Julia Culp

the complete Victor and Electrola recordings [1914-26]

ROM Ophone

Julia Culp

The Dutch singer Julia Culp (1880-1970) is renowned as one of the finest interpreters of German *Lieder*. She received her early training in Amsterdam, and later moved to Berlin to work with Etelka Gerster. Following her 1901 Berlin début (in which Lotte Lehmann recalled how her 'wonderful voice floated in silver streams'), Culp appeared throughout Europe. She made her American début in Carnegie Hall in 1913, and was a frequent visitor to the US. This 2-CD set features Culp's complete Victor and Electrola recordings. This set includes Schubert's *Ave Maria*, *Heidenröslein*, and *Du bist die Ruh*, Schumann's *Mondnacht* and *Der Nußbaum*, Brahms's *Wiegenlied*, *Immer leise wird meine Schlummer*, and *Feldeinsamkeit*, as well as *Lieder* by Wagner and Reger. A number of popular songs, including two British folksongs arranged by Beethoven, and two arias from Saint-Saens's *Samson and Dalila* are also featured.

Total timing: 2 hrs 34 mins
Transfers and audio restoration by Seth Winner

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Made and printed in England

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COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

JULIA CULP
THE COMPLETE VICTOR AND ELECTROLA RECORDINGS (1914-28)
ROMOPHONE
81035-2

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CD I (76:46)

The American Victors

1 **Träume** (Wagner) *Ger.* 4:36
27 i 1914; C 14371-1 (Gramophone 2-043009; not issued on Victor)

2 **Drink to Me Only** (Calcott) *Eng.* 3:24
27 i 1914; B 14379-1 (Victor 64401)

3 **Wiegenlied** (Brahms) *Ger.* 2:21
6 ii 1914; B 14380-2 (Victor 64402)

4 **Auld Lang Syne** (traditional) *Eng.* 2:34
6 ii 1914; B 14381-2 (Victor 64418)

5 **All Through the Night** (Boulton) *Eng.* 3:19
4 iii 1914; B 14372-2 (Victor 64414)

6 **At Parting** (Rogers) *Eng.* 2:19
4 iii 1914; B 14375-6 (Victor 64441)

7 **Stille Nacht** (Gruber) *Ger.* 3:05
4 iii 1914; B 15378-5 (Victor 64397)

8 **I've Been Roaming** (Horn) *Eng.* 3:10
4 iii 1914; B 14382-5 (Victor 64404)

9 **Mignonette** (Weckerlin) *Fr.* 1:56
4 iii 1914; B 14435-1 (Victor 64403)

10 **Heidenröslein** (Schubert) *Ger.* 1:59
4 iii 1914; B 14536-1 (Victor 64396)

11 ELIJAH: **O Rest in the Lord** (Mendelssohn) *Eng.* 4:17
18 iii 1915; C 15806-2 (Victor 74427)

12 **Ständchen**, Schwanengesang D.957 No.4 (Schubert) *Ger.* 4:08
18 iii 1915; C 15809-4 (Victor 74431)

13 **Lullaby** (Lieurance) *Eng.* 3:12
18 iii 1915; C 15813-2 (Victor 64491)

14 **Ave Maria** (Schubert) *Ger.* 2:57
19 iii 1915; B 14421-8 (Victor 64489)

15 SAMSON ET DELILA: **Mon Coeur** (Saint-Saëns) *Fr.* 3:08
19 iii 1915; B 15807-7 (Victor 64490)

16 SAMSON ET DELILA: **Printemps qui commence** (Saint-Saëns) *Fr.* 3:49
19 iii 1915; C 15808-5 (Victor 74430)

17 **Im Abendrot** (Schubert) *Ger.* 3:27
19 iii 1915; B 15816-2 (Victor 64492)

18 **Faithful Johnnie** (arr. Beethoven) *Eng.* 4:00
19 iii 1915; C 15817-1 (Victor 74429)

19 **The Cottage Maid** (arr. Beethoven) *Eng.* 2:39
25 iii 1915; B 15818-4 (Victor 64493)

20 **Mondnacht** (Schumann) *Ger.* 3:31
28 xii 1915; B 14377-2 (Victor 64554)

21 **Dank sei Dir, Herr** (Siegfried Ochs) *Ger.* 4:11
28 xii 1915; C 16938-2 (Victor 74462)

22 **Passing By** (E. Purcell) *Eng.* 2:03
28 xii 1915; B 16940-2 (Victor 64550)

23 **Gelukking Vaderland** (Old Dutch) *Dut.* 2:13
28 xii 1915; B 16941-2 (Victor 64551)

24 **Dutch Serenade** (de Lange; arr. Bos) *Dut.* 2:22
28 xii 1915; B 16942-2 (Victor 64552)

CD 2 (77:43)

1 **Du bist die Ruh** (Schubert) *Ger.* 4:16
29 xii 1915; C 16939-4 (Victor 74461)

2 **Immer leise wird mein Schlummer** (Brahms) *Ger.* 3:33
29 xii 1915; B 15943-4 (Victor 64553)

3 **Cradle Song 1915** (Kreisler) *Eng.*[1] 3:52
29 xii 1915; C 16945-1 (Victor 74460)

4 **Long, Long Ago** (Bayly) *Eng.*[2] 2:52
27 iii 1917; B 14369-9 (Victor 64419)

5 BLUE PARADISE: **Auf Wiedersehn** (Romberg) *Eng.* 3:55
27 iii 1917; C 19520-2 (Victor 74523)

6 **Virgin's Slumber Song** [Mariä Wiegenlied] (Reger) *Eng.* 2:33
28 iii 1917; C 19524-2 (Victor 64683)

7 **Nuits s'étoiles** (Debussy) *Fr.*[3] 3:33
28 iii 1917; B 19528-1 (Victor 64676)

8 **The Old Refrain** (Kreisler) *Eng.* 3:13
14 iv 1917; B 19555-2 (Victor 64667)

9 **Love's Old Sweet Song** (Molloy) *Eng* 3:46
1 v 1917; C 19661-1 (Victor 74540)

10 **Bendermeer's Stream** (traditional Irish melody; arr. Gatty) *Eng* 3:35
1 v 1917; B 19662-2 (Victor 64720)

11 **Silver Threads among the Gold** (Danks) *Eng.* 4:17
1 v 1917; C 19663-2 (Victor 74527)

12 **Stille Nacht** (Gruber) *Ger.* 2:44
1 v 1917; C 19663-2 (Victor 74527)

13 **By the Waters of the Minnetonka** (Lieurance) *Eng.*[4] 2:25
2 v 1917; B 19685-3 (Victor 64721)

14 **Ave Maria** (Schubert) *Ger.* 2:55
26 iii 1924; B 14421-17 (Victor 569)

15 **Auf Flügeln des Gesanges** (Mendelssohn) *Ger.* 3:12
26 iii 1924; B 29698-2 (Victor 1041)

16 **Es muß ein wunderbares sein** (Liszt) *Ger.* 2:19
26 iii 1924; B 29699-4 (Victor 1041)

17 **Cradle Song** (Kreisler) *Eng.*[5] 4:38
27 iii 1924; C 16945-5 (Victor 6359-B)

The Berlin Electrolas

18 **Der Lindenbaum** (Schubert) *Ger.* 3:48
17 vii 1926; Cw 153-3 (EJ 41)

19 **Der Tod und das Mädchen** (Schubert) *Ger.* 2:48
17 vii 1926; Cw 154-1 (EJ 41)

20 **Der Nußbaum** (Schumann) *Ger.* 3:11
17 vii 1926; Bw 155-1 (EW 8)

21 **Du bist wie eine Blume** (Schumann) *Ger.* 2:03
17 vii 1926; Bw 156-2 (EW 9)

22 **Verborgenheit** (Wolf) *Ger.* 3:05
17 vii 1926; Bw 157-3 (EW 8)

23 **Feldeinsamkeit** (Brahms) *Ger.* 3:14
17 vii 1926; Bw 158-1 (EW 9)

CD 1: tracks 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 11 - 19, 21 - 23 with orchestra conducted by Walter B. Rogers; tracks 3, 6, 8 - 10 & 20 with Coenraad V. Bos, piano; track 24 with harp accompaniment

CD 2: track 1 with orchestra conducted by Walter B. Rogers; tracks 2, 3, 6 & 7 with Coenraad V. Bos, piano; tracks 4 & 5 with orchestra conducted by Walter B. Rogers or Joseph Pasternack; tracks 8 - 13 with orchestra conducted by Joseph Pasternack; track 14 with string quartet and harp directed by Rosario Bourdon; tracks 15 - 17 with Michael Raucheisen, piano; tracks 18 - 23 with Fritz Lindemann, piano

Producer: Lawrence F. Holdridge

Transfers and audio restoration by Seth B. Winner Sound Studios, Inc.
Typesetting and booklet design by Louise Rice
Photographs courtesy of the Lebrecht Collection

ROMOPHONE would like to thank Ward Marston and Neil Corning for the use of records from their collections, Jon M. Samuels for his discographic assistance, and Peter Lack.

This CD set includes Culp's issued Victor discs, all made by the acoustical process, and her only electric recordings, those done for Electrola in Germany. In addition to the records included here, however, there are two March 1924 remakes of Schubert Lieder which may or may not have been issued: *Im Abendrot* (see item no.17) on Victor 567 and *Ständchen* (see item no.12) on Victor 6066. If they appeared, copies have so far eluded the producer.

Notes on the Recordings

1. An adaptation of Fritz Kreisler's *Caprice Viennois*, it originally was known as *Cradle Song 1915*. As was the case also with John McCormack's recording of the same selection, the '1915' was deleted from the title on later pressings. The noticeable extraneous studio noises may have been the reason for it having eventually been re-recorded.

2. *The Record Collector Magazine* discography of Culp, prepared by Floris Juynboll, gives take 8 as the issued version, presumably in error. Multiple copies of the record were examined, all with take 9.

3. Early HMV pressings of this record erroneously credited the pianist as 'the composer'.

4. Early labels give the song as 'An American Love Song', with *By the Waters of Minnetonka* as a subtitle.

5. This version was preceded under the same catalogue number (Victor 6359-B) by the 1915 recording. While Coenraad Bos is still listed on the label as accompanist in this replacement version, it is actually Michael Raucheisen.

In spite of a relatively short range and only a medium-sized voice, Julia Culp was undoubtedly among the great singers of her era. Her recorded legacy and contemporary evidence confirm the verdict: she enthralled her audiences by dint of her astonishing control of tone and dynamics and her innate artistry. Solely a recital and concert performer, she knew her own limits, but within them was mistress of all she undertook. No less a musician that Sir Henry Wood commented that hers was 'a widely comprehensive art and her high intelligence captured the most characteristic and varied notes of expression'. Michael Scott added in The Record of Singing, Vol. 2 (London, 1979) that she achieved her aims 'with an instrument of great natural beauty, musical in itself, like a fine Guarnerius cello, and she played upon it with a noble poise and breadth of phrasing'.

She was born on 6 October 1880 at Groningen in the Northern part of the Netherlands. In a book she wrote in 1915 when she was at the height of her fame, she declared: 'My mother discovered my beautiful voice when I was two years old, for I cried so terribly that she constantly told my father "you see she will become a singer, she has such lungs and temperament". My father didn't believe it so when I was seven years old he wanted me to study the violin first.' But at ten her voice was obviously developing fast, and soon she was singing at concerts in her home town and in Amsterdam, where she had gone to study with Cornelie van Zanten at the Conservatory there, gaining first-class honours in 1900.

She moved to Berlin to be at the heart of cultural life on the Continent and her début took place there in 1901. Although she was a success, she felt she still had a lot to learn and Wilhelm Berger, accompanist at her début, introduced her to Etelka Gerster, famous soprano and teacher. She sang at a tea party to honour the famed Mathilde Marchesi given at Gerster's school. Long after, Lotte Lehmann recalled the occasion and how Culp's 'wonderful voice floated in silver streams through the room'. From 1905, after a recital with Coenraad Bos, leading accompanist of his day, in Amsterdam, she felt ready to embark on an international career. She appeared in various European cities, once with Grieg, once with Mengelberg in Amsterdam, once with Klemperer in Prague, once with Fritz Busch at the piano in Gotha; more often she was partnered by her younger sister, Betsy. Later Culp appeared with, among others, Richard Strauss and Saint-Saëns. In May 1911 she sang the Angel in The Dream of Gerontius in London under Wood, who coached her specially for the part. She also appeared with Beecham in the première of Delius's *Songs of Sunset.*

In 1913 she finally reached the United States, a visit which eventually led to the recordings on these CDs. The critics unanimously praised her début at Carnegie Hall, even though she had hardly recovered from a stormy Atlantic crossing. One critic wrote: 'Very handsome of presence and of striking personality, she gives tremendous authority and conviction to her utterance, and her voice is supported by the most remarkable breath-control conceivable.' Another commented: 'Madam Culp is a past mistress at spinning the tone, and she thus achieves ravishing effects with her pianissimi…She breathes so easily that her phrasing is a marvel of sustained emission.' These verdicts are amply confirmed by her recordings (discussed below). They include many of the items she sang on that occasion and at a further recital in February. She continued to appear in the USA to increasing acclaim until the war intervened in 1917. In 1916 she appeared before President Woodrow Wilson at the White House in Washington, together with Casals, Percy Grainger and Granados, who tragically died at sea soon afterwards (Culp sang at a benefit concert for his children).

Julia Culp

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allowed to return to her flat. She continued to live there quietly after the war with her sister until Betsy's death in 1958. She died a fortnight after her 90th birthday in 1970.

Culp's voice has often been described as a contralto but it has much more the character of a lyric mezzo. Her accompanist Coenraad Bos commented many years later on its small range, slightly more than an octave and a half from the B-flat below middle C to the G an octave above. He added that 'such was the perfection of her tones within this comparatively small range and such was her extraordinary ability to imbue them with emotional colour and dynamic variety, that she frequently gave the impression of possessing no limitation as regards compass.'

As Lawrence Holdridge points out in his notes, she recorded quite extensively for various companies from 1906 to 1910. During the following three years for some unexplained reason, she did not visit the studios. Happily, once acclaimed in the USA she began a series for Victor in 1914 that ended only when she had to return home after America entered World War I. She returned to the USA and to Victor for four more titles, now partnered by the distinguished accompanist Michael Raucheisen, then at the start of his career. Finally there is the small, but invaluable group made in 1926 for Electrola by the electrical process just introduced.

Immediately in Wagner's *Träume* we hear the warm, all-enveloping sound that was Culp's hallmark throughout her career – that and the subtle colouring of her tone. Brahms's *Wiegenlied*, though taken very slowly, also benefits from the smooth, seamless, natural Culp manner. Included among these Victors are many popular trifles such as *Auld Lang Syne* and *Drink to me only*. Culp, whose English is idiomatic, treats them with her customary care. Her sad, plangent tone is exactly right for Rogers's *At Parting*. In consequence this song can stand comparison with Schubert and Brahms. But best of all among the 1914 offerings are the final three titles. Horn's *I've been roaming* was rightly chosen by EMI to represent Culp in *The Record of Singing*, Vol. 2. She sings it with such charm, such lightness, such a wealth of colouring to delight even the most fastidious ear. She lavishes similar gifts, not to forget that fabulous breath control of hers, on Weckerlin's teasing *Mignonette* and Schubert's ever-popular *Heidenröslein*.

Turning to the 1915 titles, we hear firstly the sole souvenir of Culp in oratorio. Her reading of 'O rest in the Lord' from *Elijah* is as consolatory as it should be, the slow tempo and the singer's generous portamento used profitably to enhance the emotional import of the piece. After more Schubert – *Ständchen* sung seductively, *Ave Maria* with poised serenity – we come to Culp's only attempts on disc at opera, and very convincing they are: two solos from Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*. *Mon coeur* is gently persuasive, not too vamp-like and sung seductively on a long breath, as is *Printemps qui commence*. Both items stand comparison with the best in the field.

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As one would expect, Schubert's *Im Abendrot* is perfect territory for Culp's dignified mezzo, finely shaped, rich in tone, the repeat of 'Schlärft noch licht' near the end uttered in a hushed piano. The two Beethoven arrangements of British folksongs are charmingly enacted. Schumann's *Mondnacht* evinces the pure legato and even tone that are of the essence here. The rest of the material in this December 28 session is not really worthy of Culp's refined art, though the two Dutch offerings were probably staples of her programmes.

However, the following day Culp produced two of her most attractive recordings of Lieder. She sings Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh* with gloriously firm, even tone and just the serene beauty it calls for. In Brahms's *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer*, it is the understanding of the song's inward mood that is so remarkable, that and her fine shades of tone. The Romberg number and the two sentimental ballads made on 27 March 1917 show just how such paltry material can be rescued by a great singer's refined art. The same is true of the Kreisler arrangements and the ballads made on April 14, and May 1 and 2.

In-between, on March 28, Culp committed to disc two of her most desirable readings. The soft-grained effects lavished on Reger's artless *Maria Wiegenlied* show just why

she so mesmerised her audiences. No child could resist such a haunting lullaby. Debussy's early song *Nuit d'Étoiles* is even more persuasive, sung with melting mezza voce and ethereal tone. Bos provides worthy support.

The final Victor sessions, in 1924, include two more Lieder from Culp's extensive repertory in the genre. The Mendelssohn is not perhaps ideally floated, but in the Liszt song we hear again the Innigkeit that was the hallmark of so much of her singing. But it is when she is recorded in Germany by a German company using the new electric process that at last the full quality of the Culp tone is encountered. I don't agree with writers who declare that her voice had deteriorated by 1926 (after all she was only 46 at the time): it still seems to have the velvet tone caught as well as the acoustic process could capture it, and the understanding of Lieder is even more marked – only *Der Lindenbaum* seeming a shade superficial. Death's message in *Der Tod und das Mädchen* is suitably consoling. The two Schumann offerings are perfection.

In *Mondnacht*, listen to the light, smiling tone and the gently accented text, the rubato subtly judged throughout. In *Du bist wie eine Blume*, the intimacy of expression is just right. In Wolf's *Verborgenheit*, Culp allows herself considerable freedom, justified by the expressive use to which she puts it, and she ends her distinguished recording career with a reading of Brahms's *Feldeinsamkeit* that is the epitome of her style at its most potent, with firm, warm tone, unfettered line, deeply considered phrasing, and subtle care over the text.

© Alan Blyth

I acknowledge a debt for information on Culp's life to Floris Juynboll's article on the artist in *The Record Collector* (May 1986).

Producer's Note

Julia Culp's first records were 32 sides made during various periods from 1906 through 1910 for the Odeon Company. In 1908, Culp visited the Berlin Anker studio and recorded eight selections, all apparently during the same session. These subsequently appeared on a variety of labels, including Scala and Coliseum. These were her only records until January 1914, when she began a fairly extensive group for the Victor Talking Machine Company, interrupted only by four sides for the German branch of HMV in May 1914. The Victor series temporarily ended in May 1917, when Culp returned to Amsterdam for the duration of the First World War. It was resumed for a brief period in 1924 during an American tour. Her final recordings were for Electrola in Berlin, 1926.

As Culp's English diction was virtually flawless, Victor featured her in several familiar American songs of the sort unlikely to have been included in her concert repertoire. These she imbued with the same artistry as in the few Lieder of Schubert and Schumann that fortunately also made their way to her discography.

The technical recording quality varies from session to session. One of the most curious is that of 2 May 1917, the sound of the two issued selections from that date (*Stille Nacht* and *By the Waters of Minnetonka*) differing so greatly that it seems quite apparent that they must have been made at separate dates, despite recording log indications to the contrary.

There are two remakes included on this CD. Of the eleven attempts at *Stille Nacht*, the first issued, take five, had a technical flaw on the high note of the second verse (the singer probably having been too close to the horn). The second, take eleven, remedied the problem to a degree. It is interesting to note that Culp also made eight takes in English of that particular song, none issued. Several audible studio thumps in Kreisler's Cradle Song were probably the reason for the replacement version. Why Victor waited nine years for that second go at it, however, isn't clear.

Julia Culp's even tone production and intimate style seem to have been ideal for the recording studio. At the same time her voice was large enough to have easily projected in the world's major concert halls and as a soloist with the leading symphony orchestras. She had a remarkable capacity to adjust the size of the voice to fit the venue.

Lawrence F. Holdridge

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81035-2 A

Julia Culp

the complete Victor and Electrolarecordings (1914~28)

ROM *phone*

ADD

COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

CD I

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81035-2 B

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